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SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA UNREPENTANT OVER REFUSING ACCESS TO
GREEK CYPRIOT VESSEL

REF: NICOSIA 256

Classified by Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Northeastern Mediterranean Affairs DDG Bilman told us openly on February 27 that Turkey's February 22 refusal to grant access to the Cypriot-flagged vessel Able F reflects GOT policy of not admitting Cypriot-flagged ships. This is in contrast with the MFA's earlier technical excuses. Bilman claimed the ship was carrying goods not covered by the Customs Union, but said the real reason for the refusal is Turkey's "declared policy" of not granting access to Cypriot vessels. Bilman acknowledged Greek Cypriots are likely to use this and subsequent refusals against Turkey, but likened Turkey's policy to a "visa requirement" that is well-known and will not be changed.

¶2. (C) News of the refusal first came to the MFA amid a February 22 EU Troika meeting in Ankara with Bilman's boss, Deputy U/S Apakan. According to Ankara European Commission Political Chief Martin Dawson, Apakan reported news of the refusal to Troika representatives but assured them Turkey was fully complying with implementation of its EU Customs Union obligations. Apakan offered a technical explanation for the refusal: the ship had come from Syria and did not have the advance authorization required of any ship entering a Turkish port. A February 23 MFA statement took the same tack as Apakan, saying the Able F's docking request was "contrary to...international rules and prevailing practices" and was therefore refused.

¶3. (C) Although the incident itself came without warning, neither Dawson nor any of our EU colleagues here is surprised at the Turkish refusal. So far, EU diplomats in Ankara, including from the Commission, have not protested the refusal to the MFA; the MFA has only received calls requesting information.

WILSON